

Deep Breath Before the Plunge

by Last Ride Of The Valkyries

Category: Halo

Genre: Family

Language: English

Characters: P. Cole

Status: Completed

Published: 2013-07-28 15:13:15

Updated: 2013-07-28 15:13:15

Packaged: 2016-04-27 04:23:44

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,084

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Vice Admiral Preston J. Cole disappeared from the battle of Psi Serpentis, supposedly into the flames of a nuclear holocaust.

Codename: SURGEON says otherwise. But where could he have gone, trapped as he was, like the Bellicose, spiraling into the overwhelming gravitational field of a massive planet; an almost star?

Deep Breath Before the Plunge

****A/N: ****As I Lay Dying**** and ****Upon a Midnight Dreary__,_**** while technically possible (although highly unlikely), were just explorations of character, and I do not predict nor want them to become canon (Cortana's story is being retold [in a more likely manner] in my story ****Halo: 5****and I think Johnson would be happier dying, since I hold that he did marry Al-Cygni but she died). That is not the case in this story. I liked ****The Impossible Life and Possible Death of Preston J. Cole**** enough to write a snippet about him just in time for the proclaimed day of mourning because I think that he should get a happy ending.****

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><p>Deep Breath Before the Plunge<p>

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><p>18 April 2543 09:37:01 (Arbitrary Ship Time, Viperidae Standard Time)
UNSC Cruiser _Everest_, Psi Serpentis System

Cole jumped. He would appear dead, vaporised by the miniature sun he'd made. That had been his original plan. Die.

But she'd stopped his plan, stopped it like she'd stopped all his plans. She was brilliant, so of course she knew what he'd do. So she jumped in during fight, lost a quarter of her ships, just to interfere with his plan, do him one better. She'd already cheated death, so she taught him how.

And now that Cole had jumped, he was free. The coordinates Lyra had sent would take a while to get to, so Cole ordered all non-essential personnel to the cryotubes. He'd selected them as soon as he'd come up with his plan. They were the men and women who were weary of the war, willing to lay down their lives and die, not just in concept, but right then, right now.

That had all changed when Lyra led a charge, sacrificed a quarter of her ships just to get a message to Cole. The coordinates she wanted him to jump to, using the data she'd sent him shortly after her dramatic resurrection. Cole waited in slipspace, impatient to get to wherever his wife had sent him.

They were still technically married. Those years had been his happiest, and Cole hoped that he and Lyra could find that happiness again. She'd been pregnant when the UNSC had caught up to her, back in 2503. That meant . . . that meant that the child would be turning forty in July. Cole wouldn't even recognise his own child. For that matter, he might not recognise Lyra, especially if she now clung to the arm of another man. Sure, he'd thought her dead, but Cole would kill himself if she'd moved on, found someone else. His love life had worn him away enough, and he certainly couldn't move on.

Cole sighed and leant back in his captain's chair before settling down for a long night.

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><p>19 April 2543 09:37:01 (Arbitrary Ship Time)<p>

UNSC Cruiser _Everest_, Slipspace

Cole settled in for another long night.

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><p>20 April 2543 09:37:01 (Arbitrary Ship Time)
UNSC Cruiser
Everest, Slipspace

And again.

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><p>4 May 2543 21:49:27 (Arbitrary Ship Time)
UNSC Cruiser
Everest, In Orbit Around Unknown Planet

The ship had just come out of slipspace, riding right on the heels of the fleet that had visited Psi Serpentis when Cole received a message from the planet. The text-only message was simple enough: "UNSC _Everest_, prepare to be boarded."

The message couldn't be misunderstood, and Cole had no weapons left on his ship. Most of the crew was still in cryosleep, and it would be

dangerous to wake them before the small transport sent from the planet arrived. It wasn't a Pelican, but it was close, only able to hold ten or so soldiers, which would be more than enough; the Navy personnel that weren't in cryo almost certainly couldn't maintain a steady orbit _and _repel a boarding party. Cole was outgunned, outmanned, and could easily be outrun, even in slipspace. Cole was too tired to try and outsmart them, especially if Lyra was on one of those ships, and not just because she was a brilliant tactical commander.

Cole typed a message to the boarders before sitting down to wait. "On behalf of my ship, my crew, and my wife, I surrender. Hangar two will be open for your use, and I don't have enough weaponry to pull off a repeat of the Callisto incident. However, I understand if you don't wish to use Hangar two." Cole opened Hangar two and waited, ordering the bridge crew to surrender should hostile forces reach the bridge.

Cole didn't have to wait long. Soldiers dressed in black combat fatigues and pointing strange rifles quickly swarmed onto the bridge. Cole sat and waited until a man wearing a suit stepped through the door and walked up to Cole's chair. The man looked to be in his thirties, with only a few wrinkles, dark brown hair combed and parted on the left, and deep grey eyes. The man spoke. "What did you mean, 'on behalf of your wife'?"

"My wife Lyrenne Castilla is captain of the _Bellicose _over there, is she not?"

The man stiffened at the name, his eyes becoming suddenly darker as he studied Cole. "Captain Castilla is indeed in charge of the \$Bellicose\$, but she never married. You lie."

Cole nearly laughed at that. Of course Lyra wouldn't have told her Innies friends that she'd married a UNSC captain. "And how would you know that?"

The man didn't seem to appreciate someone doubting his word, but he kept his anger in check. "Because I'm her son."

Cole thought back to what he and Lyra had discussed while she was pregnant. "Hello, Richard."

This time, Richard clenched his fists and dug his nails in so hard that his hands turned white. "How do you know my name?" he demanded sharply.

Cole kept his voice even. "Because your mother and I discussed that name. Sofia if you had been a girl. Now, I believe that I've complied whole-heartedly. Could you please give me some brief history of this place?"

Richard gritted his teeth, trying to keep his face perfectly neutral.

When he didn't respond, Cole made as if to open a communications channel. Richard quickly grabbed his wrist. Cole kept his own face carefully guarded as he spoke. "I was just going to contact Lyra. Unless you'd like to put a bullet through my head?" Richard glared, but let go of Cole's arm. Cole used the captain's override to open a

channel to the _Bellicose._

A moment later, the image of Lyra, aged, but still easily recognisable, appeared on one of the monitors. She spoke as though the scene in front of her wasn't surprising in the least. "Hello Preston. You're looking well."

Cole let out a snort. "An old, grizzled man with liver, heart, and endocrine transplants, and I'm looking well?"

Lyra shrugged. "You look as happy as you did when I told you I was pregnant."

Richard cut in. "So it's true? That man is my father?"

Lyra nodded. "Yes. Vice Admiral of the UNSC Preston Jeremiah Cole is your father." She paused a moment. "And my husband."

Cole's demeanour brightened considerably. "So you'll still have me?"

Lyra snorted. "Of course. I wasn't under any orders to find some high-ranking member of the UNSC, marry him, and proceed to grill him for information."

"But when I met the captain of the \$Gorgon\$, the only ship to have bested me, I was intrigued. A little later, I was in love. The conversation we had after that draw kept reeling me in. I couldn't try to convince you that the Insurrection was any better than the UNSC, but that didn't change anything, not for me. But when I was found out, I ran. I didn't want to have to face you."

"I faked my death and started this colony, Chrysalis. Someday, we shall burst from it, transformed into a butterfly, free to fly anywhere. I still hold on to that ideal. United Earth, like Rome and Great Britain before it, expanded too far and begins to collapse under its own weight. Eventually, revolutionaries will sack Rome and rebel against Great Britain."

"But the Insurrection was never evil. Some of our methods were cruel. But these methods were also natural. If a country is an organism, it strives to feed and grow, but in time, it must reproduce, split and produce children. In time, I hoped that you, that the UNSC, could realise that this was natural and conflict could cease."

Cole nodded. This was how things had been between the two of them. Discussion and debate. Sparring with words (or, unbeknownst to Cole, ships) rather than weapons. "Perhaps, in time, a mutual split could have occurred. But, if the Insurrection had been more peaceful, and perhaps, if you'd demanded less, been willing to take smaller portions, a mother and her daughter could have split on good terms. Even in her adulthood, the daughter could look to her mother, ask her questions when she needed guidance. And in return, the daughter could support the mother in her old age."

Lyra seemed to recognise the beginnings of debate, and fell into the easy rapport she and Cole had shared. However, it did not seem she was up to debate. "Perhaps. But would have, could have, and should have are immaterial. A mother and her rebellious daughter squabble amongst themselves, but when a dangerous foe-an outsider, an intruder

on the family-barges in, the daughter and her mother unite easily. They reforge familial bonds in the fire of battle as they work together to protect their family."

"Ah. So that's why you have protected UNSC vessels."

"Yes, the UNSC is the best chance humanity has for survival against the inexorable sweep of the Covenant juggernaut. My personal reasoning for getting you here, though, will take some explanation in the bedroom."

"My crew is in cryo. I'm not sure how they would react to finding an Insurrectionist colony. What should I do with them?"

Richard responded. "Give control of your ship to me, and I'll land her in the spaceport. Wake your crew. We're not actually an Innies colony. Chrysalis is a refuge from the fighting. It may have been started by the Insurrection, but we support humanity as a whole and do not advocate terrorism to get the autocracy we think the Outer Colonies deserve."

Cole nodded, stepping out of the captain's chair. "So you were raised to believe that the Outer Colonies don't have enough control." It was a statement, not a question.

Richard motioned for some of his soldiers to begin the landing sequence once he'd settled into the captain's chair. He opened his mouth. "Not exactly. But when your mother is the mayor of a world free of any UNSC control, the feeling seems natural enough."

"I understand both arguments. Right now, with the Covenant threat, humanity needs consolidated power; during peacetime, more autocracy is better."

Cole nodded at the monitor as Everest began to descend. "Congratulations on the mayorship, Lyra. You seem to have raised a son who recognises the advantages of both of our arguments. Please tell me he doesn't live with you."

Lyra grinned, clearly remembering her earlier comment. "No, he doesn't. I'll meet you at the spaceport, and show you your new house. Once you move in, you'll have properly joined the good side."

Cole looked at Lyra carefully. "During this war, there are no sides. We just do whatever we can to survive. Let history sort out who was a 'good guy'." Lyra nodded her admission.

A few minutes later, Preston Cole was happier than he had been for forty-one years. He was finally kissing his wife again after believing her a spy, then dead, then a ghost. But she was warm flesh, and while she was kissing him, she was just the woman who loved him; the woman he loved.

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><p>AN: I think Cole deserves it, and remember that reviews help improve my writing.**

End

file.